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AUTHOR Kohlberg, Lawrence; Davidson, Florence
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IDENTIFIERS *Kohlberg(Lawrence)

ABSTRACT

Psychological research on race and ethnic stereotypes and attitudes has been carried out from two points of view -- a social learning view and a psychodynamic view. Neither of these grasp essential components of young children's ethnic attitudes or prejudices, nor do they detail the major developmental factors leading to the growth of tolerance and the decline of prejudice. To explain these features of children's ethnic attitudes, a cognitive-developmental view is elaborated in this paper. This theory undertakes to explain why prejudices tend to be formed by young children in almost any cultural milieu; to explain why prejudice tends to decline with psychosocial and cognitive development in most cultural milieus, and to explain why children or adults of a given chronological age vary in prejudice in terms of environmental factors leading to development or retardation psychosocially. Prejudice in young children is primarily the active interpretation of physical and other crude differences between races and groups to which the child is necessarily exposed. Some typical seven year old second grade interchanges are presented to illustrate how prejudice emerges from the basic characteristics of the young child's thinking about social roles and groups. The educational implications of this theory are that efforts to develop interethnic tolerance should be parts of broader efforts at moral and civic education designed to stimulate moral stage development. (Author/AM)

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The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Inter-Ethnic Attitudes

Lawrence Kohlberg and Florence Davidson

Psychological research on race and ethnic stereotypes and attitudes has been primarily carried on from two points of view. The first is the social learning view. In this view, ethnic stereotypes and corresponding attitudes of prejudice are learned from socializing agents through the same processes by which anything else is learned. Ethnic attitudes and stereotypes are sub-group norms transmitted to children by parents, teachers, and peers through direct instruction, through modeling, through reward, etc. To the extent to which children's ethnic concepts and attitudes are similar to those of their family and subculture, social learning explanations have plausibility.

Obviously attitudes of prejudice of children and adults are correlated with those of others in their culture and subculture, e.g. Southern white adolescents express more prejudice against blacks than their Northern counterparts. The extent to which children's attitudes of prejudice may be directly accounted for by the attitudes and teachings of their parents seems to be extremely limited, however. Not only are the correlations between the ethnic attitudes of children and their parents low (r is less than 40 in all studies) but many children are more prejudiced than their parents, a finding hard to explain if the child is conceived of as a tabula raca on which parental and cultural ethnic attitudes are inscribed.

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A second and more complex point of view, the psychodynamic, has been elaborated to account for internal emotional processes in the child creating prejudice, processes reactive to, but not directly derived from cultural and parental ethnic attitudes. This

point of view has perhaps best been elaborated in the Authoritarian Personality and democratic theory and research. The central thesis of this view is that strong attitudes of prejudice represent hostile or aggressive tendencies which are inhibited or repressed in their direct expression toward the "in-group" and then displaced on the "out-group", on persons and groups toward whom it is more legitimate to display hostility than to the "in-group". This psychodynamic point of view grasps essential components of more clinical or pathological attitudes of prejudice, just as the social learning view grasps some of the components of cliche conformist attitudes of prejudice (or tolerance) in children adults. Like the social learning view, however, it fails to grasp essential components of young children's ethnic attitudes or prejudices, nor does it detail the major developmental factors leading to the growth of tolerance and the decline of prejudice. To explain these features of children's ethnic attitudes, we elaborate a cognitive-developmental view. This view explains findings that the major influences in the growth of tolerance are age, intelligence, and maturity of moral judgment as defined by Kohlberg's stage measure. Davidson (1974) found a correlation between I.Q. and low prejudice of .41 and between moral judgment maturity and low prejudice of .79 in a sample of Boston area seventh grade blacks and whites. (She also found an age decline in prejudice from the fourth to seventh grade). Ethnic tolerance, then, is part of growing cognitive, moral, and psychosocial maturity. The cognitive-developmental view we elaborate includes the theory of the growth of intelligence elaborated by Piaget and the theory of moral development elaborated by Kohlberg.

The theory undertakes to do three things:

a) Explain why prejudices tend to be formed by young children in almost any cultural milieu.

b) Explain why prejudice tends to decline with cognitive and psychosocial development in almost any cultural milieu.

c) Explain why children (or adults) of a given chronological age vary in prejudice in terms of environmental and other features stimulating psychosocial development or retardation.

Central to the cognitive-developmental theory is a philosophic assertion accepted by "naive" liberals and questioned by others. This is the assertion that prejudices are cognitive, irrational and morally unjust. In the cognitive-developmental theory, this is more than a naive value postulate. Research indicates that there are culturally universal stages of both cognitive and moral development. In the area of morality, cross-sectional and longitudinal study indicates that the same six stages (see Table) are to be found in the same order or sequence in every culture studied (United States, Taiwan, Turkey, Mexico, Israel) (see enclosure, Moral Education, the Cognitive-Developmental View and Table i here).

Cognitive-developmental theory, drawing on these findings, hypothesizes a universal core element of a sense of justice in all cultures by developing in a direction of greater cognitive and moral adequacy and universality through stage-transformations (Kohlberg, 1970). The theory, then, supports the common sense liberal view that ethnic tolerance represents an attitude of justice or fairness in consideration of other human beings and that prejudice is either an indifference to, or a low level of maturity of a concept of justice. It recognizes

that our objections to prejudice, grounded on moral (and legal-constitutional) principles of justice (on the principle of equality of worth and opportunity for all individuals) are the fundamental developmental grounds for the decline of prejudiced attitudes in development.

If the decline of ethnic prejudice in children is the result of a growing sense of justice, we must still account for the initial formation of prejudiced attitudes in young children. To do so we must understand the ways in which the younger child's level of cognitive and moral maturity leads him to actively interpret his social world in ways which seem to the adult "prejudiced". Prejudice in young children is not primarily learned from prejudiced adults, nor is it primarily clinical displaced aggression, it is primarily the active interpretation of physical and other crude differences between races and groups to which the child is necessarily exposed. Stages of development of social concepts and attitudes parallel stages in the development of concepts of the physical world studied by Piaget. From this point of view, the child's race or ethnic identity is a basic organizing concept in his perception of himself and others, just as is his identity as male or female and his family identity. Given awareness of ethnic or race identity, the young child "spontaneously" or naturally stereotypes his own identity or attributes good qualities to it. The young boy thinks that maleness is good because he is a male, i.e., he projects his own valued self to others of the male class. Correspondingly, he devalues the complementary class, female. Similarly, the young white child thinks white is good, etc.

Elaborating these positive-negative stereotypes and values is the child's physicalization of all social concepts. The young child thinks physicalistically, physical differences are confused with, or imply psychological and moral differences. Negroes are brown or black,

hence dirty, hence "dirty" in the sense of being unclean and immoral or bad. Here, for example, are some typical seven year-old second grade prejudiced interchanges (taken from Davidson's ethnic game interview).

Two white children

Ela: I don't want to be a Negro.

Don: Me neither. Some people don't like them, they look different.

Ela: Their hair goes boing. Here's how Roy (a black boy) walks (demonstrates duck-walk). Negroes come in two colors, brown and black.

Two black children

Ina: Jews are different. Maybe they speak another language. Their eyes are shut up more than ours are, like this (squints). Jews are kind of like other people but I don't like them. They call you names. I don't like Indians because most don't wear pretty clothes and pony tails. I like Navajoes because they do. Negroes are just like white people unless the whites are Germans. You should like all people except Chinese.

Jim: Chinese are Chinks. They are funny-looking.

These comments illustrate how "prejudice" emerges from the basic characteristics of the young child's thinking about social roles and groups.

1. Young children's thinking is physicalistic. The basic differences between people are physical differences. Race and ethnicity are associated with physical differences, hence they are basic criterion of social interpretation and evaluation.

2. Being different tends to be bad. Marked differences between people are not

neutral, they must be good or bad. The good is in the side of what is like the self and the self's characteristics and values.

In the children's comments quoted, all children comment on differences in color, face, hair-style, clothes. All find the out-group "different", "funny", "ugly". Being physically different is bad. Furthermore, negative behavior which passes unnoticed when associated with the majority is picked out as significant when associated with physical differences, e.g.:

Bill: Negroes are different. Some are mean. I saw some on T.V. in the news yelling.

The child sees physical differences that cannot be denied and tends necessarily to endow them with psychological and social meaning. In addition to the child's "natural" construction of the stereotypes and attitudes described, the child tends to anchor social status and prestige differences in physical attributes. Accordingly, poorness and low prestige are associated with racial and visible ethnic differences. Black children, then, award higher status to whites in spite of the tendency to value the like-self most. This phenomena is similar to the tendency of girls to award prestige to male characteristics in spite of, or in addition to the valuing of like-self sex characteristics.

We have described the "natural" tendencies of young children toward prejudice in terms of cognitively immature social concepts. These tendencies are compounded by a level of moral judgment based on deference to authority or power and on the association of the bad with the punished or non-rewarded (Moral Stage I). At this level of thinking, the low status of an ethnic group implies their inferiority, powerlessness, being punished, and being bad are all confused. As an example, a Moral Stage I ten year-old asked, (Was it wrong to help Southern slaves escape before the Civil War when it was against the law?) answers:

"They were doing wrong because the slave ran away. They're being just like slaves themselves.

The growth of a deliberately tolerant attitude is primarily the growth of tendencies toward role-taking, putting yourself in the other's place, and toward justice as equality, which characterize moral stage development. Here are examples of some tolerant fourth grade nine year-old ethnic comments based on moral reasoning Stages 2 and 3 and a cognitive differentiation between the physical and the psychological morality:

> "It's true some people don't like Negroes. They're just a different color. It makes you feel strange what they seem to look like, not what they really are and do. Blacks shouldn't be treated different, they're the same, only a different color".
>
> "Some people don't like Jews. They worship different. They get teased and not liked. But if their teasers were the Jews, they wouldn't like it".

Given the cognitive-developmental viewpoint described, the educational implications are that efforts to develop inter-ethnic tolerance should be parts of broader efforts at moral and civic education designed to stimulate moral stage development. Our efforts at this have focused on:

a) Socratic discussion of moral dilemmas.

b) The formation of an inter-ethnic Just Community School.

These are described in the enclosed article, The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education.

"The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education" not attached. Can be found in June 1975 issue of Phi Delta Kappa (vol. 56, No.10), pp. 670-677.

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